

SERMONS

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river sprang from a vast inland sea, sweeping with unbroken horizon round the whole compass of the sky. And we too are ready with our fears lest the river of life and salvation, that flows past our doors, and into which we have dipped our little vessels, if followed up and back to its farthest source, may prove to have its rise in some grudging and uncertain store. But in truth the Father's mercy is like that great inland sea in the continent's heart from which the river breaks, full and brimming at its birth. It is from everlasting to everlasting. I ask you to rise up and claim it for your own. Let it daily fill your heart and bless your inward life with peace.

"Trust in the Lord, for ever trust,
And banish all your fears;
Strength in the Lord Jehovah dwells,
Eternal as His years."

XV

AN INDISPUTABLE ARGUMENT

"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"—Rom. viii. 32.

IF you take up an old Bible, you will often find that it tends to fall open of itself at the eighth of Romans. The page there is dark with use, perhaps there is a mark where a tear fell and was brushed away. The possessor has turned to this chapter constantly; he has got something out of it which induced him to go back, over and over again. There is a mechanical way of talking about Scripture which suggests that it is all on one level of value; not only does it never fall, but neither does it ever rise. But no experienced Bible-lover goes on that view. He knows his way to the great passages; the books and the chapters at which generations of believing men have quenched their thirst for God, the pools and fountains where they have knelt to drink, and have risen and gone on their way rejoicing. Every one knows that the second half of this chapter is in that class. And the text before us is a good instance of the kind of verse that has drawn men so often to this page. It burns and shines with Gospel meanings. "He that spared not His own Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Without any thought of exhausting its truth, let us try to spell over together some of its indications.

1. Note how *everything in Christianity goes back to the*

self-sacrifice of God. What confronts us in Christ, and subdues the heart, is the sight of God giving up for our sake. "He that spared not his own Son"—that is behind everything that can be called Gospel, and gives it the weight and power of redeeming love.

Our text sees the Father in and behind the Son. It reminds us that the sacrifice of Christ, on which all our hopes rest, is in reality God's own sacrifice. Jesus not merely gave Himself up for us, He was given up by God, by One to Whom He was inexpressibly dear. "He that spared not His own Son."

What do we mean by sacrifice? Well, at least we mean something that is not confined to words. In all human life there is no sadder contrast than the gaping difference that may often stretch between words and deeds—between heated protestations of attachment and cold unwillingness to act. There can be no satisfaction where the language of love does not pass over into deed. Don't we all know the difference, in our shadowed hours, between a friend's sending a message and his coming himself? That is a principle illustrated by the Gospel too; in the New Testament it is applied to God Himself. Neither does His love stop at words. Neither was He content to send messages to the sinful, while Himself keeping aloof. The Cross is there to demonstrate that He breaks forth to take up the burdens of those He loves, at whatever cost of pain, and to put away sin by the surrender of Himself. When Jesus went to death, the heart of *God* was wrung with pain.

That central truth is indicated by one small word in the text, which carries us back to the old story in Genesis, when Abraham laid Isaac on the altar, and took the knife in his hand. When all was over, and the boy spared, it was said to Abraham: "I know that thou fearest God, because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son." And here

the same point is touched by the phrase, "His *own* Son." Jesus was the Father's very own. Not some angel picked at random from that higher world, not some prophet merely, but One who came out of God's life and dwelt perpetually in His heart, and who was everything to the watching and sympathising God above. And when the Father had to give Him up, when the darkness of the passion deepened and thickened in Gethsemane and Calvary, when Christ's soul began to be exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and the agony set in—then God was suffering with Him, and suffering not less than He.

So that we must look on through the pain of Jesus to the sacrifice of God. The Cross is a window into the Divine heart. The suffering involved even in some human instance may not all meet the eye. "One has seen parents at a hospital bringing a child to undergo a serious operation. *He* is sublimely unconscious of the risks and the pain involved. *They* have lain awake at nights, forefaneing the scene." The suffering that is unseen may be greater than any physical torment, and the heart of God has at least as much to bear as Jesus on the Cross. Christ was *His* child, yet He could only look on and watch the death that had to be. We must allow for that in our thought of Christianity; we must see all that Jesus was and underwent, bathed in the light of the Father's share in Him. Some years ago, just as a great liner for the East was moving out from the wharf, a white-haired old minister on the quay bared his head and with tears on his face cried to his son, a young missionary leaving for the field, "Stanley, 1 Corinthians, xvi. 13, 'Quit you like men, be strong.'" And then again, as the ship gathered way, "1 Corinthians, xvi. 13—never forget it." "And as I walked away," said an onlooker, "I understood how Moody, the great evangelist, could say that in his earlier days he spoke most about the sacrifice of Christ, but when he got older, and

had boys of his own, he came to speak as much of the sacrifice of the Father. Is not that the very truth urged by St. Paul in the great words? "God commendeth *His own* love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

How all this rebukes our narrow thoughts concerning the love of God! We catch ourselves coming to Him with prayers which suggest that He is indifferent and has to be induced to care for us. Or we drift into the notion that we are keener for the good of the world than God appears to be. Whereas the background of everything, the very landscape in view of which our whole life has to be lived, is that eternal, unchanging, self-renouncing grace that spared itself nothing, that there might be hope and light for us all.

"God loves to be longed for, He longs to be sought,
For He sought us Himself with such longing and love:
He died for desire of us, marvellous thought!
And He yearns for us now to be with Him above."

(FABER.)

2. The text goes on to teach that *Divine love, just because it gave once, will always be giving*. The God whom we encounter in Christ is of such a kindness as never calls a halt or begins to measure its bestowals. The Father Who gave Christ up for us all, surely He will give us everything besides.

You will have noticed that very often in the New Testament we have faith reasoning along the line of the phrase "how much more." Now and then Jesus Himself does it, and we can see that usually it is in one direction—from the less to the greater—that His argument moves. If even your children, He says to the disciples, get some smaller gift from you, God will certainly bestow on you the greater. "How much more," He asks, "will your heavenly Father give you the Holy Spirit?" But sometimes we find "how

much more" pointing the other way. It moves this time not from the less to the greater, but from the greater to the less. That is what happens here. "He that spared not His own Son"—He that did the greatest thing that even God could do, how much more shall He give other and lesser things in addition? Water falls into certain curves in the vast billows of mid-Atlantic; it will be consistent with itself everywhere, and the same curves will reappear in the shaken contents of some cup or goblet on our dinner-tables. The sunshine flashes back in great crimson and opal reflections from the polished temple dome; it will mirror itself just as perfectly, and according to the same laws of light, in the tiniest dewdrop. So, says the Apostle, God gave up His Son to death because He loved us, and from that boundless revelation of His heart you can guess how He will provide for all minor needs. Paul's mind rests on the supreme thing, as an unsurpassable height, and, standing there, from that summit he sees all other bestowals spread before him. There is a principle fixed by what God underwent in Christ's death, a principle which has settled once for all how the Father cares about His children. We know now that God loves us better than He loves Himself, therefore we can expect from Him nothing but the best, up to the very end.

Now this "how much more," as St. Paul applies it, is the very point where most of all God and man differ from each other. At least, except so far as God in grace gets hold of man and makes him like Himself. I mean, we see here the difference between love and selfishness. As one commentator points out, "the argument of selfishness is that he who has done so much need do no more; the argument of love is, that he who has done so much is certain to do more." How true to life that is! How we constantly set limits in our own minds to what we are going to give to

those who need us. How we measure our resources after a burst of generosity and console ourselves by reflecting that there will be no necessity to keep it up much longer. Every new gift is a strong reason against giving any more. But God is love, redeeming love, and therefore with Him the presumption, or rather the certainty, is the other way round. He has given Christ, therefore there is no longer any such thing as a limit. Men who in the Great War had surrendered their boys to the nation's need were glad to supply money too, and night-watchings, and service with the ambulances, and all kinds of further service that might help to fill vacant places; for after you have done the *decisive* thing, all else is the small dust of the balance. The mother who has risked life in bearing the child will not grudge the nursing or the sleepless care. Selfishness says: "Past sacrifice is enough and more than enough, and now I must think of number one." Love says: "Where are the new openings for help and tenderness? for my friend has learned to trust me, and I must never let him down." But we should not have known that this is what true love means, had it not been for God's bestowal of Jesus, which gave new horizons and dimensions to the word. *He* commendeth His love towards us by that great initial act of sacrifice, which goes deeper than all our sin.

We often speak of the mystery of the Atonement. We say, truly enough, that it is difficult to comprehend how forgiveness comes through the work and suffering of Christ, and how what went on at Calvary avails to save us. And often by our very manner of saying this, a suggestion is left that the difficulties are purely intellectual. If we were abler, if our minds were more subtle or profound, it is hinted, we should not find the Cross so unfathomable as we do. But doesn't the difficulty lie far, far deeper? I feel that the great reason why we fail to understand Calvary is not

merely that we are not profound enough, it is that we are not good enough. It is because we are such strangers to sacrifice that God's sacrifice leaves us bewildered. It is because we love so little that His love is mysterious. We have never forgiven anybody at such a cost as His. We have never taken the initiative in putting a quarrel right with His kind of unreserved willingness to suffer. It is our unlikeness to God that hangs as an obscuring screen impeding our view, and we see the Atonement so often through the frosted glass of our own lovelessness. And the one cure for that is just to let God's own Spirit of love, and of light and truth because of love, fill our hearts and clear our vision. As the lessons of love are mastered, we shall more and more have understanding of the wonderful grace that gave Christ for men.

3. Note, lastly, that *it is because of the Cross that we are sure of God's daily providence*. It is *the same* God—the apostle by the turn of his sentence emphasises that point—it is the same God that delivered up His own Son who will assuredly provide all other things; and He will do the one just because He has done the other. Or, to put it otherwise, if we wish to understand the providential care of God we must never lose sight of His redeeming love at Calvary. There is Some One looking after us, Some One who is faithful and will see us through. How do we know that? We know it with perfect certainty, because of the love that suffered all for us in Christ.

Providence, you must often have felt, can become a curiously cold and almost steely word. It's an abstract noun at the best; and when people of whom you would expect better things say 'Providence' when they mean the Father, you feel as if they were keeping Him at a distance—holding Him at arm's length—and avoiding personal relationships. And similarly, there have been whole types of religious literature

(and even long periods of time) where men spoke perpetually about the providence of God, but without infusing into that idea anything of the passionate colour and depth of spiritual meaning seen in God's great act of love at Calvary. Now, what was the result of that? Just that, when treated so, the very thought of providence itself became hard and bloodless, or the Fatherhood of God turned into nothing more appealing than genial good nature intent on making things pleasant for everybody, and Christianity lost its glow and power and romance. No; providence and redemption are like two parts of the same vital issue; they are one in living flesh, and if you amputate the one, the other will bleed to death. Things go wrong infallibly when we forget that the providing love on which we depend day by day is no mere soft geniality but the *same* love as agonised for our salvation in Christ—as deep, as high, as pure, as eager for our victory over self and sin.

But, then, on the other hand, if providence and redemption *are* kept thus close together, how rich and exalting the thought of providence grows! It makes all the difference to life, it ensures a quiet heart in our daily work and in our homes, to know that the very love that would not withhold Christ is watching over all our concerns. To repeat it: There is Some One looking after us, Some One Who gave His Son for our salvation. That keeps trust in providence a deep and noble thing. God did not give Christ to feed my love of pleasure, but to make me His child; well, His providential oversight of life has exactly the same purpose. It is not out for our comfort but for our likeness to Himself. Or again, the *faithfulness* of God's providence is a lesson we learn from His sacrifice when Jesus died. Such a love can never leave or forsake any whom it has once visited. One of my friends told me not long since how he went in to call on an old man who was dying in great suffering of some

malignant disease. "Did you have sleep last night?" he asked. "Yes," was the reply, "I had snatches of sleep and glimpses of a Father's love." Where did the old man get a faith like that? From the sight of God that we have in the Cross of Jesus. It was *the same* God in both experiences. He had found the Father in the reconciling love which cleanses from sin, therefore he could see His face even through the darkness of a tortured night.

"He shall also with Him freely give us all things." What does "all things" mean? It means this at least, that if you grasp the love of God in Christ, you can reckon on everything else that will help you to live as His child. Daily forgiveness, daily light in sorrow, daily aid in weakness and temptation, daily power to help others—all these, and a thousand more God will give you freely. But it really means that God will give you *everything*; He will make you masters of life, kings of the world in His name. There is nothing in all the universe, with your Father's stamp on it, that you may not claim and use, nothing that received with a child's glad and thankful heart will not work you a blessing. Take the promise in its fulness. Let it fill your heart and make you glad. "All things are yours; whether the world, or life, or death—all are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."